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WHIRRAKEE

January/February 2015 Vol. 36 No. 1

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $40; Family $50; Concession: Single $35; Family $40. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $40.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with members sharing their recent natural history observations. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 5:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Alistair White, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner, Diana Collier, Jan Orr, Devi Shanty, Simon Hay

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188. To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club
Vol. 36, No. 1, January/February 2015
Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*), which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions should be posted or e-mailed to the editor at least two days prior to the last Wednesday of the month. They will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although space restrictions occasionally require shortening of articles or holding them over till the following edition of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
I have lost a month of summer while catching up with my family in Europe, so I am unsure whether the big rain we received in early January was the only rain this summer. By the looks of it, it has invigorated the insect and bird life. Our plants need all the help they can get. This month, we have the second part of Peter Ellis' essay on the disappearing and diminishing flora in our district. Brace yourself before reading it because it is a little depressing. That's all the more reason to vigorously conserve what we have left. Peter's amazing memory will no doubt help shape some of the activities this year as the club celebrates its big anniversary. But, no matter what is planned for 2015, let's celebrate field natting this year!

Front page photographer: Bill Flentje (Bill died in December, see article on page 10).

Owlet-nightjars are nocturnal birds. They are described as 'crepuscular', meaning being active at twilight. Rod Orr recalls that Bill spent many hours, days, weeks searching for some of our rare & interesting species, especially Nightjars, which he recorded calling in the Whipstick. He was responsible for naming a couple of low rises in the area, 'Nightjar Hills', from his association with the birds in this area.

Short Notices

Nestbox Monitoring

Discussion is under way with the ranger of Crusoe and Number 7 Parks, to assist with the monitoring and recording of fauna species utilising the park's many nestboxes.
Members who are interested in assisting with this project should contact Kerrie Norris ph. 54478017 for further details

Interesting daisies, killer flies and the mysterious *Acacia difformis*

by Rod Orr

Jan & I travelled out to the Kamarooka on December 30th, mainly to see how the Summer-flowering daisies were managing to survive the hot weather - it's always an interesting place to visit even during seasons and weather that are less than tempting. One of these daisies is shown on page 6.
(an interesting plant... there is very little information on the genus Haeckeria*...ed.)*

Jan was birdwatching along Campbells Road and noticed a very large fly, which landed a couple of metres away and then sat long enough for her to attract my attention. I didn't have a telephoto lens on the camera so I just tried to sneak closer & closer taking photos as I approached. It wouldn't let me get much closer than a couple of metres so the image on page 6 is the best I could manage - enough to confirm my guess that it was a Robber-fly.

Then, when it flew away with a loud buzz, Jan noticed a flash of orange-yellow from its back. Its size (more than 5cm long) and the colour of its back were enough for an ID. It's one of Australia's largest flies - *Blepharotes* sp. (probably *coriacius*) - which is also the world's largest known fly. They hunt and kill other insects.

The wattle, *Acacia difformis*, is another of our local plants which also flowers during Summer - they make it worth a trip to our northern forests during hot weather when you just wouldn't expect to find much, if anything at all, in flower. When it was first noticed here by Bendigo Field Naturalists, they referred to it as 'Mystery Wattle'. It does flower well as the photo on page 6 shows, but rarely sets seed. However it is quite widespread throughout its range (much more commonly found in inland NSW where it is referred to as Wyalong Wattle) so perhaps it does manage to set seed in hotter and drier habitats.

That feature was one of its 'mysteries' - how did it manage to disperse? Also, its Summer flowering was considered mysterious by our earlier Field Nats observers.

Some quite large thickets of *Acacia difformis* still exist locally although some of the larger roadside clumps along the Calder Highway have suffered badly in recent years from roadworks - it's usually just seen as a greyish-green shrub of no special value, I suppose. In the Kamarooka, this species occurs most commonly as single specimens or in sparse groups of only a few plants. It's practically invisible until it flowers but you'll only see it flowering if you defy the heat of Summer.

(Editor's note: The website PlantNet, NSWFloraOn-line might shed at least some light on the dispersal mystery –
'...the name, ['difformis'] refers to the unusual venation (two longitudinal veins) of the phyllodes. It suckers freely and may form dense stands, but is not particularly common over its range.'
Nevertheless, suckering only works over very short distances, and the two longitudinal veins are not obvious from the photo...)

Lastly, it is also a good year to see Quandongs, *Santalum acuminatum* flowering in the Kamarooka – December-January is the flowering season for this interesting species (see photo on page 6). They are at the southern extreme of their natural range in the Kamarooka and need just the right conditions for many fruit to form from such large clumps of flowers.

Kamarooka at the height of summer

Photos by Rod Orr (see also article on page 3)

Cottony Haeckeria, one of the summer-flowering daisies in the Kamarooka

Robberfly *Blepharotes* sp. (probably *coriarius*)

Mystery (Wyalong) Wattle, *Acacia difformis*, an unusual summer-flowering wattle

Clumps of Quandong flowers, *Santalum acuminatum*. Let's hope the conditions are just right to turn many of these into fruits.

Brilliant Butterflies on *Budleja davidii* in the Dandenongs Photos by Ian Brown

Imperial White (Jezebel), *Delias (harpalyce?)*

Macleay's Swallowtail, *Graphium macleayanus*

Three spiders from Spring Gully.
(Photos by Jenny Shield)

The male Gnaph (left) is an undescribed species of the family Gnaphosidae, who have large kidney-shaped posterior median eyes and large posterior lateral spinnerets.
The male Aname (below right) is an undescribed species of funnel-web spider. The males of this species are brown, and have a thorn on the anterior legs, obvious in the shadow in this picture.

The pale wolf spider (below) is also a male
Allocosa palabunda

The miraculous mistletoe Photos by Joy Clusker

Joy had been reading some old Bendigo Naturalist magazines and came across an article on Mistletoes by J.W.Kellam from 1971, with a paragraph on *Amyema miraculosa*, which follows below:

'*Amyema miraculosa* (Round - leaf Mistletoe): Small oval-shape and rather thick green leaves; Flowers smaller than in other species, with five red petals; Fruits ovate, lemon-coloured. Growing on Quandongs (*Santalum acuminatum*) and other Mistletoes at Inglewood and Wychitella. Not common.'

It was part of a larger article on Mistletoes of the Bendigo district.

All photos were taken at the start of January at Rose Hill, Inglewood

Amyema miraculosa, Fleshy Mistletoe in flower. Joy also found it on Quondongs the same day.
An interesting species of mistletoes, as it seems to specialize on growing on parasites. Such habits make plants doubly vulnerable as they depend on a host that depends on a host…

Where have all the flowers gone? A historical gallery of our diminishing flora by Peter Ellis

(See article on page 8)

Left: Murray Pine, (Oct '73), with Mr and Mrs George Walker and Reg Smart.

Right: *Tetratheca ciliata* Black eyed Susan, Sedg-wick Race (Oct '74)

Below: Common Heath in reds, pinks and white. Ridge Road (July 1974)

Grevillea rosmarinifolia (variety glabella?) Bagshot (both red and green) forms

Phebalium and Austromyrtus Near Shadbolt's Skylark Rd (Sept. 1970)

Below: *G. rosmarinifolia* Skylark forms (both red and green)

Left: Dwarf form of Rosemary Grevillea Sedgwick race

Left: G. rosmarinifolia Wychitella form

Below: Daddy Long Legs Bagshot North (Sept. 1970)

Below: *Diuris punctata* var *longissima*, (Nov 1972)

Fairy's Aprons (below) and Austral Ladies tresses at Sutton Grange soak (Feb 1971/1972)

Where have all the flowers gone! Part 2
by Peter Ellis

Part 1 of this series was printed in the December Whirrakee. *Many of the plants mentioned below are shown on page 7. If not, then they are shown here in black and white. Part 3 (and 4?) will follow, whenever there is space available.*

Murray Pine, there are several in the Kamarooka Forest, but did you know there was at least one in Wellsford Forest? What happens (if not already) when DEPI put a burn through there? They do not recover. The photo is of the one in Wellsford Forest and there were many young seedlings around it at the time, and this picture is taken eons ago (Oct '73), as Mr and Mrs George Walker and Reg Smart are in the photo. Whilst I took the photo, I no longer remember the locality.
Here (see page 7) is a most magnificent *Tetratheca ciliata* (Black eyed-Susan), at least a metre round on the Sedgwick Race (Oct '74) and a Photoflora entry by Redvers Eddy in the '60s. How long since you've seen *Tetratheca* like this?

Next I turn my mind to the Fryers Ridge where there are some great displays of Common Heath in reds, pinks and white (see page 7). But way back in time, our club had excursions every few years on behalf of the Native Plant Preservation Society, armed with axes, to clean out a Flora Reserve on the Ridge Road (to encourage the species it was fenced to protect). All I can remember were the lovely displays of *Platylobium*; does anyone know where that reserve is now?

We also regularly cleaned out the *Phebalium* patch on Skylark Road, armed with axes, but now the fence has gone, it's no longer required as nature (wallabies) takes care of that. Do you remember the magnificent displays of *Phebalium* on the road section just past Shadbolt's (Sept '70, see also page 7)? The drought knocked the stuffing out of these plants, yet they are drought resistant, but not so much with fire, so DEPI has taken care of the final touch.

Below: the pure white *Phebalium festivum*

Grevillea rosmarinifolia (variety glabella?) in both red and green forms (see page 7) and some intermediate colours, as well as natural hybrids with *G. alpina* used to be readily found along Skylark Rd near the dam as well as further down where Sandfly Rd intersects. The mature shrubs are gone as far as I can ascertain, and there are only some roadside verges of seedlings, waiting a cull with the next burn or roadside 'scraping'. The population of mature plants at **Bagshot North** are decreasing, there's several dead plants and competition from weeds encroaching. Incidentally there's a subtle difference between the Skylark Rd and Bagshot North Rd populations, to my eye as a bushman, not a botanist.
The flowers at Bagshot North cluster thickly along the stems, particularly on one side, the **Skylark Rd forms** tend to have more solitary 'spider flowers' dangling around in small clumps, and the green form is a brighter lime to lemon colour. I've found very dark red forms at **Wychitella**, similar to the Tarnagulla form (see page 7 for photos).

The dwarf form of *G. rosmarinifolia* along the Sedgwick Race appears to be diminishing in numbers particularly in what was its best locality near Semmens gate. It seems to be holding its own further along by the 'Mandurang Springs'. Also, I haven't been able to find the lovely ruby red hybrid between it and *Grevillea alpina*. There used to be magnificent waist to shoulder height specimens of the latter with arching branches laden with various shades of red to orange and apricot flowers.

Diuris punctata var. *longissisima*, there was a lovely clump of this mauve orchid near the railway line of the midland highway between the Bagshot crossing and Goornong (see page 7). Tom Patullo and Bob Allen made the well-intentioned but fatal mistake of showing the plants to a local orchid fancier, but when they went back the following day to photograph, all that could be found were the holes in the ground. We have hoped more might have been there or come up from seed, but no luck so far.

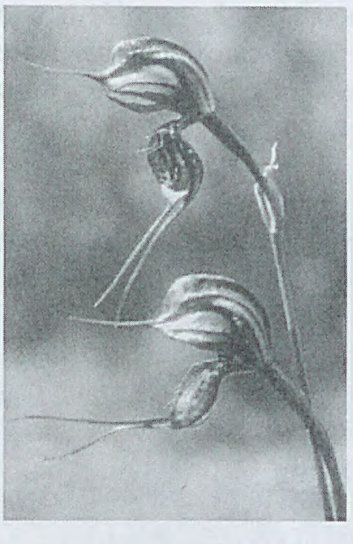
There was another form of *Diuris punctata*, not the above variety, that grew in masses on a property at Sutton Grange. Unwittingly the owners 'supered' the paddock and that was their demise. I don't know if any survived on the fringes.

And whilst we are on the subject of Sutton Grange, there was a soak a short distance over the fence and below the Public Hall. The water in this soak was crystal clear and there was an assortment of marsh plants, but in particular Fairies' Aprons (Feb '71) and the beautiful miniature Austral Ladies' Tresses Orchid (see page 7). These were at their best in the middle of February when Bob Allen in particular and Tom Patullo and I would make annual trips to view it. But then the land was subdivided and/or sold and cattle put in. Overnight with cloven hooves and dung the soak transformed into a black cesspool and the orchids and fairies' aprons gone forever. This was something that happened Australia wide to fresh water holes and springs with crystal clear water and aquatic life and small fish upon which Aboriginal people were dependant for survival.

Another locally rare orchid is the 'Daddy Long Legs', *Caladenia filamentosa* and also variety *filamentosa* whose habitat is under Kamarooka Mallee on one block only of the former property of Leon Ruedin; now National Park between Bagshot North and the Kamarooka/Egerton Forests. It is just hanging in there; given our dry seasons and again if a control burn should occur, that could be the end of it (see page 7 for image of one form).

And while we're on orchids, there's the Flying Ducks (*Caleana major*, see above), from memory first found on the edge of the Goornong tip by Sho Takasuka in the middle '60s, then they were located further up the Fosterville road on Tom Read's property. Later Fred Taylor showed us the best location at Bennett's Rd near where the O'Keefe track now runs along the old railway line.

Also the small duck orchid (*Caleana minor*) was known to be there, Fred and Bob Allen found two surviving plants only and not seen since. Later Leon Ruedin found more duck orchids behind Skylark Dam in the Whipstick and then another excursion we found them McIvor Hill along with a red form of *Pterostylis biseta* (McIvor Hill, 1971, see below). Following this, Leon discovered a small patch of the small duck orchids on Apollo Hill in the Whipstick.



...continued at the next possible occasion...

Vale *FLENTJE* - *William* Maxwell (***Bill***).
21/7/1918 - 1/12/2014

In the early 70's when the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club (BFNC) were strongly advocating for the conservation of all of the greenbelt around Bendigo, there was a particularly good working relationship with officers of the local Forestry Department, of whom Bill Flentje was notable. In relation to strengthening the preservation of the Whipstick public lands, Bill drew up a list of priority blocks for acquisition based on their ecological significance.
Bill joined and became good friends with many in the BFNC. He was extremely interested in birds, their photography and recording their calls, and in fact made some excellent tapes. For many years he presented 'Bird of the Night' to the bird group. His dedication and expertise contributed considerably to the knowledge of members with many interesting and informative discussions triggered by his photos and wide knowledge of nesting birds.

Besides local and regional publications supporting conservation and natural history, Bill also made many worthy contributions to, *A Field Guide to Australian Birdsong*.
Another dedicated, respected and valued Field Naturalist has departed to that Bushland Heaven in the Sky. Vale one of nature's gentlemen.

Written by Kerrie Norris and Peter Ellis

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday, February 11 7.30pm
Our speaker this month will be Casey Visintin, PhD Candidate, Quantitative and Applied Ecology Group, School of Botany, University of Melbourne. The title of his talk is 'Safer roads for people and wildlife: can we be more proactive?'
All are welcome for this first meeting of the new year.

Sho Takasuka 'A Great Australian'
Peter Ellis will be talking about Sho Takasuka on **Friday 6th of February at 2pm** at the lecturette theatre at BRIT (upstairs from the library). Sho was a dedicated member of the BFNC in the mid to late 1960s, and Senior Vice President in 1967, when our General Meeting was filmed by a Japanese TV crew. Sho was the first to discover duck orchids on the edge of the Goornong tip (see page 9).

Family Nature Club
The Nature Club activities will continue in February 2015, so look out for announcements or check out their website.
Registration:
Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326
http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.
WRIN meetings held on the 1st Saturday of the month at 1pm the Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall

Bendigo Native Plant Group meeting.
All interested people are welcome to come along. Meeting starts at 7:30pm on the third Tuesday of the month, Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall.
Next meeting: 17th of February.

Birds and Plants of the Little Desert
A Photographic Guide by Ian Morgan, Graham Goods and Maree Goods

This book is illustrated with over 950 photographs, depicting more than 200 birds and 430 plants that live in the Little Desert. The majority of these photographs have been taken close enough to show the finer details of the individual birds and plants. Other photographs depict the general vegetation and various habitats.
This book will be useful not only in the Little Desert, but also for appreciating the birds and plants on adjoining roadsides and in nearby bush reserves, particularly the Wail State Forest. It can be purchased directly from the publishers at <littledesertbook@gmail.com> 0427 832 249.

Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forest Walks

These walks are on Sundays, they are free and non-members are welcome. We meet at 9.30am outside 30 Templeton Street, Castlemaine (Continuing Ed.) and carpool to the start of the walk. Bring water, morning tea and lunch. Walks usually finish mid afternoon although the shorter March walk should finish by midday. Walks are cancelled on Total Fire Ban days in the area. For more information ring Bronwyn Silver on 5475 1089 or Julie Hurley on 5472 5082.

15 March Rise and Shine Bushland Reserve Leader: Geoff Park. Ph. 0418138632. 4km

19 April Muckleford Forest. Leader: Neville Cooper. Ph. 0401 319 659. 8-10km
17 May Nuggetty Ranges. Leader: Brian Cuffley. Ph. 54 75 1556. 6 km